

Sacramento Economy
Oral History Project

Interview

With

Mr. Ed Bussey

[This interview was originally inspired by the Fall 1997 History 282C Oral History Seminar with Professor Christopher Castaneda, California State University, Sacramento.

Another interview was completed and transcribed to satisfy requirements for the class. This "extra" interview transcript was completed March, 2002]

Submitted by Amy Holloway

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CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, SACRAMENTO

DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY

MISSION STATEMENT

A group of graduate students are creating a project to record the memories of persons contributing to Sacramento's diverse economic history. The graduate students are enrolled in History 282C, an oral history seminar, administered by the History Department at California State University, Sacramento. This seminar is part of the required curriculum for the Masters of Arts degree in Public History. The goal of this 1997 fall semester project is to complete 10-15 transcribed oral history interviews. These interviews will represent various aspects of the Sacramento economy.

Once the interviews have been recorded, they will be transcribed and donated to the Sacramento Archives and Museum Collection Center (SAMCC). Researchers interested in Sacramento's economy will have access to the interview transcriptions at the archives. This seminar/project is being produced under the direction of Dr. Christopher Castaneda, Director of Oral History at California State University, Sacramento.

We welcome your participation in this project. Please feel free to contact Dr. Castaneda by phone (278-5631), or correspondence, if you have any questions about this project.

INTERVIEW HISTORY

Interviewer/Editor:

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History
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Interview Time and Place:

March 16 and May? 3, 1998: Home of Ed Bussey. First session, approximately 45 minutes, and second session, approximately one hour and fifteen minutes.

Editing:

Holloway checked the verbatim transcript of the interview against the original tape recording and questioned Mr. Bussey about some items that were hard to hear. Editor questions are marked with question marks and brackets. Editor insertions are also bracketed. Mr. Bussey provided a biographical sketch.

Tape and Interview Records:

The original recording of the interview is located at

[Begin Tape 1, Side A]

AH: . . . Amy Holloway. Today is Monday, March 16th, 1998 and I am interviewing Mr. Edmund Bussey at his home in Kensington, California. Thank you very much Mr. Bussey for letting me interview you.

EB: My pleasure.

AH: Um, first I would like to ask you when and where you were born.

EB: I was born in Bakersfield, California, December 6th, 1922.

AH: And could you tell me the names of your parents and where they were from.

EB: My father's name was Edmund Bussey, Sr. and he was from Atlanta, Georgia. My mother's name was Charlotte Rainbow Bussey. She was from Lorain, Ohio.

AH: Wow Rainbow that's a very interesting middle name. How did she get that middle name?

EB: Well the father didn't like the idea of a slave last name. He named himself Rainbow. He liked Rainbow. He

was slightly bowlegged. They used to tease him about his bowleg, so he decided that Rainbow would be a nice name.

AH: Hmm. And could you tell me the names of your siblings.

EB: I have two brothers and two sisters. My oldest brother is Charles Bussey, youngest brother Bruce Bussey. My sisters are Verna Bussey and Ann Bussey.

AH: Ok and were they all born in Bakersfield also?

EB: Yes, they were all born in Bakersfield.

AH: And where do you fit in, which?

EB: I'm the second child. Milton is the oldest, and next am I.

AH: Ok, could you tell me a little about your childhood.

EB: Well it was an ordinary childhood. Went to schools in Bakersfield. And, I was a member of a Boy Scout troop. Uh, otherwise it was a very ordinary childhood.

AH: I understand that, um, at the time that your were growing up it was during the Depression?

EB: Yes.

AH: Could you tell me what that was like for you and your family.

EB: Well we learned the value of a dollar. My folks didn't have much money. We helped supplement the family income especially during the summer. We would work in picking hops, agricultural products primarily and then in the fall before school started we would pick cotton. And this money helped buy clothes. During the winter months we would find other ways to raise money. We'd collect bottles and cans and rags, we even sold bones.

AH: What?

EB: There were many places you could sell things then.

AH: What would people do with bones?

EB: Well, I don't know if they used them to burn up or, I don't know what they did with them. But this was like a junk dealer. They'd buy this stuff. And [they'd sort out the] bones. They [had a way of disposing] of them. They'd have [a way of disposing] of copper products, iron, tin. So there were just many things

and we lived not too far from the dump, the city dump where we'd find stuff over there that we could sell.

AH: And what um was the community like, like what kinds of people did you live around and were there many people around you?

EB: Uh, ordinary people, in about the same financial situation as ours.

AH: Was it mainly an African American community?

EB: Uh, no it was mixed. When I was quite young we lived in a more affluent area and I'd say they were mainly white, although some blacks and some Hispanics. Later on as I grew older there was a higher percentage of blacks. This as the Depression came further along.

AH: And was the population kind of spread out, like, you know like in a given area?

EB: It was, spread out, the lot size that the homes were on, were about 50 or 60 feet wide and 120 feet deep. So we were spread out.

AH: Um, what was it like picking cotton, and like the agricultural things that you did, and was that um . . .

EB: It was hard work and very hot. You could do your best and think that you had picked quite a bit and you'd weigh it and it'd be only maybe fifteen pounds. And so it was just very hard.

AH: How old were you when you first started doing those types of, that type of work?

EB: I guess about 8 or 10.

AH: Until like about the teenage years?

EB: Yes.

AH: And was that something that your parents did? Did they, when they grew up did they do like agricultural type work with their family also?

EB: Yes, uh, early on my father was a chauffer and made pretty good money but later [the?] depression came on, uh, we had to do agricultural work.

AH: And you, uh, spoke before the interview, you spoke about your grandfather. Could you tell me a little bit about your grandparents' backgrounds and what they did?

EB: My grandfather was a minister—

AH: This is your father's father?

EB: Father's father.

AH: And what was his name?

EB: His name was, uh, George Bussey. He graduated from Morris Brown College and became a minister, uh, A.M.E.Z., American Meth—African Methodist Episcopal Zion, and, uh, he was assigned to churches in California. And he established a number of churches in different areas such as down in Imperial Valley, Riverside, San Bernadino, Ventura, Colosa, and Bakersfield.

AH: What about your grandmothers and your other grandfather?

EB: Um, his wife was—can't think of her first name—died and so I don't remember her. On my mother's side my grandfather was Nimrod Rainbow and his wife's name was Nancy. And they bought a home in Allensworth, California and lived there for about eight years until they died. Then the family moved to Bakersfield, my mother and her sister[s?] moved to Bakersfield.

AH: Um, could you tell me a little bit about Allensworth, California?

EB: At the present time Allensworth is kind of a dusty uninteresting place. But at the time my mother lived there—and I remember I was quite young—it was a thriving community and the people were prosperous. And they often gave fundraisers to support World War I and we had groups that would, uh, [work] on different projects to raise money for the troops.

AH: How did your grandparents first hear about Allensworth?

EB: There—through Colonel Allensworth who was a retired colonel from the U.S. Army who wanted to establish a community for blacks where they would be able to live in peace without being harrassed by whites and they saw the ad and made contact and arranged to buy land in Allensworth.

AH: And what year was that?

EB: That was in about 1914, thereabouts.

AH: And what happened to Allensworth.

EB: Uh, the railroads decided not to go through Allensworth on the route from Fresno to Bakersfield. Instead they chose to go through Tulare and Visalia and so with less traffic running through Allensworth businesses didn't prosper and also the water level dropped partly because of excess pumping of water by farmers and in addition there was arsenic was found in the water and a number of people died from the spoiled water. And so many things contributed to the demise of Allensworth.

AH: How do they think that arsenic may have gotten into the water?

EB: Well, no one can say for sure, but it was rumored that some of the oil companies wanted to uh use oil on that area, and apparently there had been oil—my Mother used to tell about being able to light a fire just in the ground, and uh, like for cooking. Just dig a little hole and put something over it and you could actually cook. So apparently there was a certain amount of natural gas that seeped up through the ground and some people had received offers from oil companies to buy their land real cheap. And then later it was learned, rumored, that the oil companies [just sent a, used, slant] drilling methods to drill under the area to suck the oil out without having to buy the land.

AH: Um, now returning to your childhood, how did it work for you to do this work and also go to school?

EB: Well education was very important for us and for our parents, so uh the work we did was primarily in, well during the summer months and on weekends, so we didn't miss school.

AH: Okay, so after, what kinds of things did you do after school? for like activities?

EB: ...played football and adult, I mean, children things.

AH: Uh-huh, and what were some of your favorite subjects, as a child, in school?

EB: I think English. My father was really a stickler for speaking correctly, so we learned, and spelling was very important. I'd say reading and spelling were number one.

AH: Was your school integrated?

EB: Yes, the schools were quite good in Bakersfield at that time. In fact I expect that they were better then than they are now. There've been so many experiments with education and it's never established which is the best

method for teaching. There was no records kept. In our school ideas [would] come up--they tried new ideas teaching but records [were] not kept as to which way was the best--they just go to the next.

AH: And what kinds of dreams did you have as a child in terms of like dreams of you know when you grew up what you wanted to be and things like that?

EB: I didn't have very much because there [was] not much that I could see on the horizon that I [would ever] do. I never expected to get a college education. I had hoped I wouldn't have to do menial work like picking cotton all my life, but I couldn't really see anything out there in the future that I would be doing.

AH: So how did that happen, your leap from high school to a college education?

EB: Well, my father and mother divorced. My father moved to Los Angeles--

AH: How old were you when they divorced?

EB: I must have been about 17 or 18, and I had a chance to live with my father in Los Angeles and I went to school where I learned...(pause)...took several courses in

mathematics and I, well, World War II was starting and I was able to get a job at Douglas Aircraft Company designing aircraft machine tools. And, so I took courses at Los Angeles City College. [Then] I went to University of Southern California and I took more night courses. I was working about sixty hours a week and taking classes. And [as the war went further along] I continued my education in the technical subjects.

AH: [Then] you served for a time in the war?

EB: Yes, for one year, from 1944 to 1945.

AH: And what was that experience like?

EB: I didn't see action. The war was winding down and so I spent about six months at Fort Lewis, Washington, and six months at Fort Warren, Wyoming. And the war ended and I returned back to Los Angeles. And I continued with my education at Los Angeles City College-- University of Southern California, I mean.

AH: And then what year did you graduate?

EB: I transferred to USC to University of California, Berkeley in 1946 and continued studying electrical engineering. I graduated from U.C. Berkeley in 1949.

AH: What was the atmosphere like on the campus at that time?

EB: At University of California?--Uh [pause] very unfriendly--well, I don't know if unfriendly is exactly the word, but it was not a friendly place for anyone. Classes were crowded and the classes were large. Usually there were only teaching assistants that were working with students and even then you didn't have many people to talk to, to ask questions.

AH: What was the percentage, or amount, of African Americans at that time?

EB: I'd say very few.

AH: Especially in the engineering program, it seems like you would be like a pioneer at that campus. Were there many who had come before you in that program?

EB: --Not that I know of, although we did have one African-American instructor at U.C. Berkeley. His name was Joseph Gier, and I looked upon him as a role model. Later he died. But anyhow, I continued study with engineering. It was a very difficult time when I went to CAL. At USC we had studied DC machinery during the first year, first two years. At CAL, they started the

first year studying AC machinery and so I had a very difficult time. In fact I flunked out of engineering college and had to take letters and science courses. But eventually I built up my grade point average and I was able to get back into the engineering college. And this time I started working, studying with others, rather than trying to do it alone. And being part of the study group I found that I was able to do much better than before, just studying alone.

AH: How did your interests get focused on engineering as a career?

EB: Well it's something I'd always been interested in, even since I first started working with Douglas Aircraft Corporation. I thought engineering would be a interesting area to work in. So it's something I'd wanted to do for some time.

AH: So when you graduated--take a pause. . . Ok, we paused for a moment, now we're starting again.

EB: Ok, one of the things I wanted to mention when I was growing up. We lived not far from the city dump, so we were able to find things there that we could sell. One time I found the frame of a bicycle and another time I found a handlebar. I eventually found enough parts to

put together a bicycle. That was the only bicycle I ever had until I was grown, but I appreciated having a bicycle, cause other kids had one. And since I had built it myself, I really took pride in it. I didn't leave it round. Some of the kids had bicycles and they'd leave it on the street. People would steal it. Not mine. [They would never get it, cause] I really prized it. It was nothing special, just a simple bicycle, but it meant a lot to me.

AH: That's neat. The engineer at work. [Laughs] Wow, that's great--ok, we're going to take one more pause . . . Ok, we're coming back from our pause. I was inviting Mrs. Bussey, Sandra Bussey, who reminded Mr. Bussey about the story about him building a bicycle, and could you say why you--

SB: Well, Ed apparently has always been able to work well with his hands, I mean picking cotton yes but--[he and she laugh]--but, putting together the parts of a bicycle and I think probably that had a, played a great part in engineering. He's always interested in how things work. And even if you can't do it yourself, to know how they put together and what not is very important. He has that kind of a mind that can take things apart and put things back together.

EB: But when I studied electrical engineering I couldn't put electrons together . . .

SB: You can't see those . . .

AH: Thank you Mrs. Bussey.

SB: Anytime . . .

AH: [laughing] Um, so when you graduated, where did you start working?

EB: I graduated from U.C. Berkeley in 1949 and I got the first engineering job with the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation in Stockton. At that time they were designing the Central Valley Project which would include a system of canals--dams, canals and pumping plants. We studied the Folsom, well building a dam at Folsom, California. And another dam below it. And then a system of canals that would convey the water to Southern California. And it would go through Tracy where it would be pumped into canals. And the first two years that I worked for the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, I was classified as an electrical engineer. Then later our office in Stockton was closed and we were transferred to Sacramento. And in Sacramento I was reclassified as a civil engineer. And

this experience gave me a chance to learn about the overall project, not only as electrical, but also as a civil engineer. So I worked for U.S. Bureau of Reclamation until 1956. And, while I was living in Sacramento, I found out how difficult housing was, not only for myself, but I could see that there were about 2,000 people a month moving to Sacramento. And housing was tight, and especially for African Americans, there just were very few rentals. And at the same time the city was beginning to redevelop the west end of town because the area between the Capitol and the Sacramento bridge was just one giant slum. And the city decided they really needed to clean out all that and build new office buildings. And of course this, by removing people out of those areas--and they were just simply knock buildings down. They were not really successful in finding housing for them, but housing became even more critical for the black community. And so I thought well something should be done to help get housing for people. And at this time I decided I would go into the real estate business. We only had one black real estate person in Sacramento at that time. He was primarily working with the insurance rather than with housing.

AH: What was his name?

EB: J. R. Smith. And, so I took the broker examination and became a real estate person. I resigned my job with the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation and opened a real estate office. And, suddenly I was swamped with more business than I could hardly handle.

AH: Where was your office located and what was the name of it?

EB: My office was located on the corner of Franklin Boulevard at 12th Avenue, and [it was] called Ed Bussey Real Estate Company. I found that even though the housing market was tight, blacks were not able to buy homes in any of the new subdivisions. The companies just simply would not sell to them. They would make some excuse, like [that] the properties were already sold, well a number of reasons. They just simply would not sell to black people. But at the same time I learned that there were a lot of repossessed homes, G.I. repossessed--

AH: What is G.I.?

EB: Well government, owned properties, that had a G.I. loan originally and after it was foreclosed, the government put these homes up for sale. Some were G.I. repossessions, some were F.H.A. repossessions. And

these were nice homes and completely reconditioned and very liveable. And many of them were in the same subdivisions that would not sell to blacks, but the government made these homes available to anyone, and terms were very favorable. Homes had been repainted and they were very nice homes and they were scattered all through the county. So I sold homes to a number of people, and so we were able to get folks scattered all over.

AH: Ok, so these G.I. homes, these were G.I. loans for U.S. veterans?

EB: They were homes available to anyone. The home had been sold originally to a person with a G.I. loan. Later if that person did not keep up the payments and was foreclosed, then the government became the owner of the property. And so they would sell the resales, G.I. resale homes and F.H.A. resale to anyone. Even though the original buyer had a G.I. loan or an F.H.A. loan, after it foreclosed and the government became the owner, the government resold to anyone without regard to whether they were a G.I. or F.H.A. person.

AH: I understand that members of your church were concerned also about the housing situation. And what church did you go to?

AH: And then we were trying to figure out what does G.I. stand for.

EB: Well G.I. meant government issue and this would apply to like when you're in the service, the government issued your uniform, boots, hat--that's all government issue. Then later when you got out of the service, the government issued you education opportunities--they actually gave you a stipend, so much a month, towards your education. They'd give you [provisions] for getting a loan on a home. There were a number of things that were given by the government. They called them G.I. loans if you got a loan for a home. And you'd get--the loan was not made by the government. The government simply guaranteed that you would pay for the house. But then later when you don't keep up the payments and [the government--and the lender] foreclosed on you, then the government would have to pick up the tab and they were responsible. And they would [recondition] these homes and sell them, sell them to anyone. However, unfortunately, blacks were not able to get housing in the new subdivisions. And in some of the existing housing, they may not meet the government requirements. So you were kind of left out in the cold. Course, once the government owned the home, then they would sell it to anyone that met the requirements. Based on your income and credit, you

could buy it [at] G.I. resale and that's where I was able to find a lot of good quality homes to sell to people.

AH: And even with the G.I. status, was there any difference in how white or non-white G.I.s were treated in terms of their coverage with the loans?

EB: When, after they bought the resale home?

AH: Before that--

EB: Before you got the G.I. loan, you would have to meet the bank's requirements. The G.I. loan itself was made by a bank or other lender. And the banks along with the developer of these homes [was just subject] not to sell to blacks, so blacks were not able to get G.I. loans. But after the person that originally got the G.I. loan, after they failed to make the payments and it was foreclosed, then the government then became the owner of the property. Then the government would sell it as a resale property. They called these G.I. resales because they originally had a G.I. loan, same for F.H.A. resales which originally had F.H.A. loans. Those that were sold directly by the government, anyone could buy--black, white or whatever. But the original G.I. loan, the first loan made was through a bank or

other lender. And those you had a hard time getting because [usually] the bank would not approve your credit or the developer would just simply not sell homes to you.

AH: And F.H.A., that's Federal Housing Act?

EB: Yes.

AH: And what was its origins?

EB: Same would be true. The original F.H.A. loan would be placed either by a bank or a lender. And they'd put up the money for it. And this was backed by the government. So when loans foreclosed, the government became owner and would sell it as a resale property--F.H.A. resale.

AH: Ok, now, in terms of the church--before you were telling me about the church's involvement. So, what kinds--like what form did the protests take? Were they like petitions or rallies or just attending meetings?

EB: Well different ones would--there was a Fair Housing Committee, and I was a member of that. We would attend meetings wherever the Redevelopment Agency would have them and we always put the question to them, "Where are

these people going to go? What provisions have you made to help them with housing?" And they would say, "Oh yeah, we're looking, we're trying to find places for them." But I don't know a single family that they actually placed in other housing. Cause housing was very scarce and anything that they could find was substandard which wouldn't meet the requirements of the people. And a lot of these African Americans were well educated. They had good jobs working for the state of California or other places. They were qualified and should have been able to buy a home or rent a home just like anyone else.

AH: So for the--you were in the real estate business for a little over 10 years? 1956 to 1967?

EB: That's right.

AH: So you focused mainly on selling homes in the subdivision areas.

EB: Wherever I could find good housing.

AH: Um, did you ever get any like harrassment from other companies that weren't selling to African Americans?

EB: I thought it would be a real advantage if I could be a member of a multiple listing bureau cause they had access to listings of all of the real estate brokers in the area. And so I applied for membership and was told, "well no, we just don't have your kind in our organization." I said, "well I don't see why not. I have a friend in San Francisco who's a member of the Real Estate Board there. And if it's all right there it should be all right here in Sacramento." And they checked and said, "well Ed, you're right. There is a black member of the San Francisco Board." So they allowed me to have membership with the Sacramento Real Estate Board and also the multiple listing bureau. So I was able to get in to the organization. And we-- [well I] had a good relationship with the real estate people.

AH: And what was your like social life and family life like at this time in Sacramento?

EB: So so. We had a lot of friends.

AH: Were you married at this time?

EB: Yes.

AH: And when did you get married?

EB: 1946.

AH: And what was the name of your wife?

EB: Mary.

AH: Mary? Ok, what was her maiden name?

EB: Brown, Mary Brown.

AH: She was from Sacramento?

EB: No, she was from Berkeley.

AH: Ok, and did you have any children?

EB: No.

AH: Ok, and how many--how long were you married to Mary?

EB: Twelve years.

AH: So you lived in Sacramento that whole time?

EB: Yes.

AH: And what um, I guess during like the late 50s-early 60s, what was the African American scene like? Like I've heard about different jazz clubs and all in Sacramento around that time period, like the pre-redevelopment time.

EB: Yes there were several jazz clubs and from time to time we'd go to those. And we also came to the Bay Area frequently, and came to clubs here. And we were involved with people here as well as in Sacramento.

AH: And what were some of the other things you were involved with, like in your church, in terms of any programs that your church had? Or like community programs?

EB: I can't think offhand.

AH: Ok, but in general you liked living in the area. I mean, it seemed like you were very energetic about the work that you were doing.

EB: Yes, well it kept me very busy. In fact at one time I had as many as 15 salesmen working for me. And I had assumed that having a lot of salesmen would--they could do a lot of work, but I had to follow very closely what they were doing to be sure that they were not making

promises that they couldn't keep. [And so] some were promising that the down payment would be very low and monthly payments would be very low. Whereas in reality, it was important to be very realistic with people, not to just make a wild guess and let people expect one thing, whereas it might--additional sales--having additional salesmen, it caused a lot more work than it might normally would have.

AH: Are you in touch with any of the people--

EB: Not too often. Most of them still are in the Sacramento area. I met a few of them since then--

AH: Are they still in the real estate business primarily?

EB: Couple of them are, couple of them are now brokers and [?] are doing well.

AH: So when many of them came to work for you were they like young--

EB: Yes they were inexperienced. We had a training program to make sure that they understood the information to fill out forms and how to calculate the down payment and closing costs, so they could know exactly how to give information to the buyer [themselves].

AH: And then, let's see, was there anything else that you'd like to say about your experience in Sacramento and in the real estate industry?

EB: Not too much about the real estate industry. I would like to mention about the ski club, that I think we were one of the first--well, we were one of the first black ski clubs in the country. I think it was in 1957 that, thereabouts, where we became organized. Some of the members were living in the Bay Area and some of us lived in Sacramento. And we used to go skiing in the Lake Tahoe area. And had a great time.

AH: What was the name of the club?

EB: It was called Ski Skamps and--[doorbell in background]--so we had a great time--

[End Tape 1, Side B]

[Begin Tape 2, Side A]

AH: --3rd, 1998. My name is Amy Holloway and I am interviewing Mr. Edmund Bussey today. This is part two of the interview. We're here at his home in Kensington, California. Thank you very much Mr. Bussey for allowing me to interview you today for the project at Cal State Sacramento. In our last interview we left

off in talking about your career in Sacramento, and I would like to ask you at this time about your insights or thoughts about the Sacramento economy at the time that you had your business there, and also if you have visited Sacramento recently in the last few years or if you have any insights as far as how the city has changed over the years.

EB: The economy of Sacramento has always been good. It's a place that a lot of people are attracted to, Sacramento, because of the jobs available through the State of California. There are large numbers of professional people, engineers, people with technical backgrounds, as well as people involved in businesses. So, I'd say the economy has been and I'm sure still is quite sound for residents of Sacramento.

AH: What were some of the primary occupations that people had at the time that you were in business in Sacramento?

EB: I knew quite a few people who were engineers, who worked with the State of California. Also I knew people who were associated with the military. Sacramento had two air bases, the McClellan field base and the Mather Air Force Base. So people were employed

by those two military installations in addition to State of California and other businesses.

AH: In terms of your work in real estate, in your biographical sketch you said that Sacramento became one of the more integrated cities in our nation. Could you comment on that?

EB: Originally, blacks were not sold new homes in the subdivisions surrounding the city. When I went into real estate business I found that there were homes available that were FHA resales and GI resales. These homes were scattered throughout the county of Sacramento, and I sold to a number of people homes that were adjacent to subdivisions that would not sell new homes to them. And homes were available through resale--government resales in all areas, and so I was, I think, instrumental in finding homes for a number of people throughout the county. So as a result, the housing industry was pretty well integrated. And the important thing was that this did not create any problems. I do not know of a single incident where blacks who moved into these government resales were adversely affected by whites or others. They were accepted in the community as ordinary citizens.

AH: Have you visited Sacramento since leaving there, since leaving your business there.

EB: Yes I do occasionally. I have a sister that still lives in Sacramento, and from time to time I visit her and other people I know there.

AH: And it seems that a lot of people have been moving to Sacramento recently from the Bay Area. What do you think are some of the reasons for that?

EB: Well I think job opportunities are quite good in Sacramento. And so people are attracted primarily for employment reasons.

AH: So in 1967, that's when you left Sacramento?

EB: Yes, I returned to the San Francisco Bay Area.

AH: And you began working at the Bechtel Corporation?

EB: Yes that is correct.

AH: So what motivated your interest in terms of working at Bechtel and leaving Sacramento?

EB: I had an offer I couldn't refuse. I had previously six years experience in engineering, three years as electrical engineer with the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation and also three years as civil engineer with the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation. So I had a quite interesting background and I had a chance to join the Bechtel Corporation in the Division of the Pipeline and Production Services. This is a division that specialized in building pipelines, pumping stations and also slurry projects for transportation of products such as oil, coal and whatnot. So I found the work to be quite interesting and that's why I jumped at the opportunity.

AH: Did you supervise a number of people in your department as an electrical engineer?

EB: No, I didn't supervise any of the people. I was not in a position of supervision.

AH: So did you work--how did you work, like was it more independently or a team--?

EB: No, it was a team. I had supervisors and there were several of us who worked under the supervision of different individuals.

AH: And I understand that you did a two year assignment in the London office.

EB: Yes, I thoroughly enjoyed that. There were three big jobs that came up about the same time for the pipeline division I was in. One was the Alyeska project in which a pipeline was going to deliver crude oil to Valdese and be transported by ship. The second was a Mobil Oil Company gas project in Indonesia. The third was a job in London in which we were to design an oil drilling platform project in the North Sea. I was fortunate enough to get the project in London and I thoroughly enjoyed that experience.

AH: So what was it like living in London and working there?

EB: It was great. Had a chance to--well the work was interesting, designing the oil drilling platform. In fact we--the platform project was so successful that in addition to drilling and pumping oil at one point we were working on, there was more oil and gas than we had originally anticipated and we had to build a second platform to liquefy natural gas and pump it ashore to be [put in storage tanks]. So there were two [designs] that were developed. As far as living in London, it was a great experience living in a foreign country where they spoke a language similar to American. And,

had a chance to see a lot of the British country as well as the continent. And so it was a great experience.

AH: Well I know that accompanying you to London was you wife, Sandra Bussey, who's here today also and, would you like--Mrs. Bussey, would you like to come in and make any comments on your lives in London at that time.

SB: Well, as Ed has said, we enjoyed the assignment. It gave us a wonderful opportunity to see a lot of, not only London museums and enjoyed theater and concerts and so forth, but it also gave us a chance to see a lot of Britain, including Scotland and some of Wales. And also to travel in Europe. It's only a couple of hours and you can be in Paris, a couple hours and you can be in Spain and so Italy, two hours away to Rome. So it was ideally located. We did a lot of travel. Now one of things that we found was a certain comradery among the Americans who were also assigned in England. We were the only African Americans. And that made--well it made a difference in a sense but it was a very close group of people because we were all outsiders. We were not just outsiders as African Americans, but we were all outsiders. It also gave us experience with the various aspects of the immigration and color problems that they have in England, and not too different from

the same kinds of things that we know about in California and in this country. There were definite examples of incidents that gave you to know that things were not all well with the British Empire. But it was certainly an interesting experience and one that we will long treasure and we still talk about.

AH: Don't leave so soon. Actually I should really ask you all when you met and when you first married. We got to backtrack a little bit now. So could you tell me about when you all met and when you first became married?

EB: Yes, members of my family that belonged to the same church as I who mentioned about someone they wanted me to meet--

AH: And what church was this?

EB: Downs United Methodist Church--

AH: That's in Berkeley?

EB: It's in North Oakland. And I wasn't especially interested in meeting anyone at the time.

AH: And what year was this?

SB: It was 197--

EB: ['71]?

SB: No Ed, we got married in '71. Ok so this was in, yeah the beginning of '71.

EB: And so at the same time, Sandra taught school with the husband of the couple and she indicated that she'd like to meet someone.

SB: Yes, I was looking for a husband.

EB: And so, they arranged for Sandra to come to church on a particular Sunday and for me to also be there at the same time and get acquainted. So we actually met in the social hall at my church.

SB: And it's the church I belong to now. I didn't at the time. I belonged to a different church.

AH: Is your story of meeting told in the book about Downs Church, by any chance?

SB: No, no.

AH: Ok, but that's called, that's by Dona Irvin right, the book about Downs Church?

SB: Yes, that's a very interesting one. No that really goes back to earlier days. You were a member there [but] that was before our story.

AH: When did you first become a member of the church?

EB: 1946, Reverend, well Bishop Roy Nichols was the minister performed the wedding ceremony for my first wife and I, and I attended his church. And he was very helpful to me when I was going to the University of California. I had been studying electrical engineering at University of Southern California, and when I moved to U.C. Berkeley, I was having a very difficult time in the school. But he encouraged me to stay in there and work with study groups instead of trying to study on my own. He encouraged me to continue with my studies and I think I owe a lot of gratitude to him for encouraging me. Eventually I did graduate in electrical engineering.

AH: So you all have been married--ok, you married in 1971-- that was quick, you met at the beginning of 1971--

SB: We met Super Bowl Sunday, January 1971, and we got married in August of the same year.

AH: Isn't that something.

SB: It didn't take long.

AH: So that's 27, this is your 27th anniversary year in August. Beautiful.

SB: Good place to meet, to find a husband or a wife, is in a church. It was really wonderful.

AH: When you all lived in London what were you doing?

SB: I was mostly riding on the underground going places in London. I wasn't working but I did visit--I had gone on leave from Berkeley Public Schools. At that time I was a librarian. I'd been a teacher before and later on taught again, but was very interested in education and so, of course, so I spent time visiting some of the schools in London, primary schools. Very interesting, that was at the time also that people were quite interested in the British [?] school system which is their young children and how they're taught and so forth. So it was really quite interesting. But I did spend a lot of time in the British Museum and there are many many many things to do. And I was with some of the Bechtel wives. We would go different places. And we'd shop and, you know, do things like that. And then

on weekends, Ed, well he worked very long hours. He didn't get home often till 8 o'clock during the week. But on weekends we would go, we'd take the train, very good transportation system there in London, and we'd take the train and we'd take off and go places in the countryside. And then when he had time, longer times, then we'd go on trips. We went 10 days to Italy. We went one long weekend to Copenhagen, Denmark. And we went to Paris on weekends, some what 3 or 4 times. My parents came to visit while we were there and spent a couple of weeks with us and we took them around. And his father came and I think he told previously about taking him to the western front of World War II, didn't you, oh World War I--you told about that on your interview. And my cousin Audrey came and visited. And we went to Scotland and just had a lot of people actually from California, other people from California came through. And they would bring us things: sourdough bread, somebody brought Rice-a-Roni. There was a sugar shortage going on and somebody else brought us some sugar from home. So it was quite, it was really quite a wonderful experience.

AH: Mrs. Bussey spoke of the fact that you were the only African Americans in this team that went over to London. Could you tell me a little bit about that

experience and how many people were in your team altogether also?

EB: I'd say maybe 20 people. There was the program manager and the project engineer and different ones who were specialists in civil engineering. Others who had mechanical engineering backgrounds and electrical. So we each had a function--

SB: Did you explain what it was for?

EB: Yes, the oil drilling platform in the North Sea. This is unusual, a place to have oil in the bottom of a sea that was about 500 feet deep. And the winds were often 70 miles an hour. Water was--the conditions were really terrible for drilling oil, but there had been exploration to determine that there was oil down there and it was a matter of anchoring this platform in such a way that they could have the drill hole down and bring it up through pipes. And it had to be pumped ashore a distance of maybe 50 miles. And so the whole thing was quite an engineering feat, but it was successful.

AH: And how did it feel--did you feel like there was any difference in treatment in terms of being the only African American?

EB: No actually I felt even more comfortable than here in the states. We were a very closeknit organization. We worked together, we lived together, nearby. We had a very close arrangement with close connection with each other.

SB: But also you were working with the English people who were very glad to have you working for them because that helped their economy. They were very accepting, the ones--

EB: Yes, we were treated well.

SB: We were invited to parties and we entertained the local, you know the Bechtel group as well as--the Bechtel San Francisco group as well as some of the English. But, you know I mean, in the greater scheme of things it was--they were having a lot of problems. That was the beginning of the influx of migration in large numbers of people of color from the West Indies, from other of the commonwealth nations, and Indians also. And so they were having a whole, you know the color scheme was getting darker and the English, this tight little island, was not used to this. [And there] were all kinds of problems.

EB: Well you see the situation was that these people thought they were British subjects because they were part of the British commonwealth. They thought they had a say as British subjects. They should be able to go to London, work the same kind of job as any other British subject. However the English thought well those are now the same as we are and they shouldn't come here and take our jobs away from us. This was their attitude.

SB: That sounds familiar doesn't it. Bought other people coming here taking jobs.

EB: Although some of these jobs were menial jobs [of course] the English would never consider doing: driving a subway train or--

SB: Cleaning restrooms.

EB: But the people worked. They were hard workers and felt that they had as much right as anyone else.

AH: So in working at Bechtel here back in the United States how many people of color were working with you?

EB: It must have been around 110, 120--

AH: And that's like out of how many?

EB: They had a huge payroll. Bechtel's a very large organization. So we were less than 1% of the total of employees.

AH: When you first started were there any other African American engineers?

EB: I think there were a few. There were not--there were more that came later but when I started there were not that many.

SB: Were there--there were other staff--

EB: Yeah, people, not engineers, but working in other capacities, some in the administration, some in non-technical jobs.

AH: And I understand that you did an assignment also in Saudi Arabia?--thank you so much Mrs. Bussey--

SB: Anytime.

AH: We look forward to speaking with you again too.

SB: You know you will.

EB: I worked in Saudi Arabia for about seven months and it was a wonderful experience. I was accepted highly by the Saudi people. I was invited to their homes. I think I was invited to their homes more than some of the other white employees. I got to know the Saudis quite well. When I'd be invited to their homes I'd meet all the menfolk. I [rarely] got to meet the women. They were kept separate and, but--. I went there at a time when they were celebrating Ramadan, which is a religious season similar to our lent, and also at the end of the Ramadan season they had what is called Id and that's similar to our holy week. That's impressive how some of the religions are to Christianity. Oh, I went to Saudi Arabia on single status. There wasn't any much for a wife to do over there. Some of the wives that did go were not able to work. They had to stay home till the husband came and couldn't even go to the store to do any shopping until they were escorted by their husband. So it was a very lonely life I think for most of the women, the wives that went. And I was there for seven months on single status. That was long enough. I'm glad that I had that experience. I don't know if I'd ever want to go back again. Although it would be interesting to see some of the things that I was involved in. The project we were to do was to build an industrial city on the

Persian Gulf. This particular place had been a fishing village which later was abandoned and there was nothing much to do there. The water was a little bit deeper there than most other nearby places in the Persian Gulf, although you could walk about a half mile out into the water and the water would only be waist deep. But it's still a little deeper than other places. So this is the place we selected for this industrial city called Jubail.

AH: That's J-u-b-a-i-l?

EB: Yes, J-u-b-a-I-l. Jubail later had developed into a sizable industrial city. It now has a population of about 250,000 people. They have a steel mill. They have a plastics plant where they can utilize their oil products to develop plastics. There are a number of other industries that are there now. And someday perhaps I would like to see what it looks like. It's just hard to imagine after having been--well we had to drive about 40 miles a day to go out there to plan the utilities that were to go in. Jubail was hit during the Gulf War, and [there's] a lot of damage was done at the time from scud missiles, but the city's still thriving as I understand.

AH: I didn't ask you what year you did this assignment--

[tape pause]

AH: Ok, so you all went to London in 1974-1975 and then you went to, you went to Saudi Arabia in 1976?

EB: Thereabouts yes.

AH: And so you returned to the States and you continued to work as an electrical engineer until 1978?

EB: Yes, well no, let's see. When I returned from Saudi Arabia I was assigned to a nuclear project as a quality assurance engineer.

AH: And how's that--what does that mean? What do you do as a quality engineer?

EB: Check for documentation, make sure that the nuclear project was safe.

AH: And where was this work focused, like at what sites?

EB: Well, several. There were sites in Pennsylvania, there were sites in Arkansas. There were on the staff for all the nuclear projects and there were about six that we were involved in. And we checked to make sure that the, all the equipment that was purchased for the site

had the correct documentation, to be sure that the projects were safe.

AH: Wow did you have any particular concerns, that's very--
[scary] work--

EB: We found a lot of errors, for example like the PG&E-- that project down in Southern--the Diablo Canyon project that PG&E was designing. PG&E had never built a nuclear project before, but they had good engineers who had sound engineering experience and they assumed that they could build a nuclear project just as well as anyone else. However, they did not check the criteria for the force that had to be allowed for an event, an explosion, so there was not sufficient foundation work under some of the buildings. And anyhow these criteria change from time to time and eventually the place where they were designing more concrete footings to protect the buildings had changed. And so the criteria [assessed] that the foundations were in the wrong places. But we found the error and as we saw the work that we did for PG&E, Bechtel got the job to see that the plant was built correctly.

AH: In your years as an engineer, and in particular with this part of your career working as the quality engineer, have you seen kind of like a rise in terms of

the environmental concerns or like legislation or organizations you know petitioning to engineers like yourself or to companies like PG&E regarding the environment?

EB: Yes, people are afraid of nuclear projects and I think to a certain extent for good reason. There have been releases of pollutants into the air from time to time. And the public is just very concerned and I think as a result a lot of the projects have been abandoned and in our particular work Bechtel has pretty much gotten out of the nuclear business because it just has not been in the interest of the community. People are just deathly afraid of nuclear problems. In fact that's one of the reasons why in the work I was doing the company downsized as a result of loss of contracts to build nuclear projects. And when they downsized I, along with a lot of other people, was laid off.

AH: So you were laid off in 1986?

EB: Yes.

AH: And then you retired?

EB: I started working as a consultant primarily with quality assurance for transit projects.

AH: And what were some of those transit projects?

EB: Some were with the San Francisco Municipal Railway. Some were with Los Angeles County Transportation Commission. There were some in [pause] AC Transit and other transit--Seattle. So when I left Bechtel in 1986, actually I was old enough to retire but I hadn't really thought in terms of retirement. I started attending meetings and inquiring about opportunities for consulting and that's when I found the first job I found as a consultant with the San Francisco Muni. And the work that I did was assisting a consultant who lived in a suburb of Pennsylvania. His specialty was fare collection and he let me do a lot of--let me represent him for a lot of the work that was being done in the fare collection for transit projects along the west coast. We built new fare boxes for buses and light rail vehicles. These were electronically operated fare boxes that would count the money that went in--count all the coins and dollar bills. And so the computer within the fare box, it was to determine the amount of money. So we were pretty successful with that project and then we went on to other projects in southern California.

AH: So when you say that you built these fare boxes, is that like something you have a patent on?

EB: Well we didn't actually build the boxes. Those are built by separate manufacturers, but we designed the fare boxes so that we could indicate how this electronic equipment would function.

AH: And that's the same type of design that they use today?

EB: Yes, where you put nickels, dimes and quarters in the fare box and it gives little sounds like "ding ding dings" counting the money and then it gives a tone to indicate that the full fare has been received. So the driver doesn't have to look at the fare box and he doesn't have to give change. The box took care of all that and it's a highly secure box. The driver can't help himself to money [or go in]. Anytime the box is opened for any reason or other, that time is recorded. So the box was quite sophisticated.

AH: So y'all were the first to design this type of box?

EB: I wouldn't say we were the first, but we did advance the state of the art. And I had a chance to witness the tests that were performed to make sure that they functioned correctly.

AH: And are there any other projects that you'd like to describe that you worked on at some of the other

transit agencies, and are you continuing this work today?

EB: We had hoped to have--

SB: Cable cars!

EB: Oh, my first job was cable cars. Cable cars have long since been one of the San Francisco standards. In fact it's a moveable [pause] national treasure. And the cable cars have been operated by people, drivers and conductors for years and years. These old-timers, many were about ready to retire. And the City of San Francisco found that there was not very good documentation how the cable cars were operated. So they needed to have manuals to describe the operation, maintenance and the care of cable cars. So it was our job to work with the--every aspect of the cable cars and write manuals on how the system would be maintained in the future so that new people would be able to operate them as well as the old-timers. So this was a fascinating thing to see how these cable cars operate. It was like getting paid for a hobby that we had. And the cables run the entire length of the city almost and it's [run with a big motor] in this cable car museum. It's an old system--[over 100 years of age], but it works. And it's a very interesting project. So we did

that even before I met this consultant at [fare collection]. One of the later jobs that we were doing with AC Transit and the--

AH: Seattle?

EB: No, we were trying to develop a system whereby all of the transit agencies in the Bay Area could be coordinated into one system where you could get on the bus, perhaps in Concord, and you ride AC Transit, go across the Bay, ride on Muni and Samtrans. We wanted a uniform system where all of the transit agencies were coordinated where you could have a card similar to a BART card that would be a uniform card where each transit agency, you could ride on any transit agency with one card. The system, this consultant that I worked with did an outstanding job, but for some reason the transit agencies have never accepted that. They like to have their own empire and this is not a very good arrangement for the riders. [?]. It just maintains these beaurocracies, transit agency beaurocracies. Anyhow we did have a system that was developed.

AH: And what year was that proposed? [tape stop and start]
So you were telling me the date of this project and what was the name of it?

EB: It was called the Translink Project that was conducted by the San Francisco Bay Area Metropolitan Transportation Commission. The idea was that all of the transit agencies should be linked together so that a person could use a card or some type that would have value stored in it just like a credit card or like a BART card, whereas you could use the card on each and all of the transit agencies. So you could ride from one district maybe in Concord to another district in Oakland going on maybe the AC Transit, on BART, on San Francisco Muni, on Samtrans. All these transit agencies would have been linked together so that you would not have commute problems where you have--well one transit agency, you got to transfer and go to another transit agency, pay more fares. So the Translink project was going to try to consolidate all the transit agencies into a unified system of record-keeping and fare handling.

AH: And you're saying that it's kind of been tabled at this point, the proposal?

EB: Yes, apparently the transit agencies could not get together. They all seem to be competing for the money that's available for transit. And as a result a lot the money that's going into transit is going into roads, for more and more cars, creating more and more

congestion, more road rage. So it's unfortunate that this project was not put into effect. I think that in time it should after it's realized what an inconvenience it's making to people who have to go through [?].

AH: Are you consulting on any other projects at this time?

EB: Not right, not at the present time. I was scheduled to work on the project, BART, that was to go to San Francisco Airport. And my job would have been as a consultant for quality assurance. But the project was delayed for quite some time and my role would not have taken place for maybe a year. And I decided that I think this is a good time to retire completely from [business]. That project would have been a real pressure cooker for anyone that had that position. And I did not feel that I want to be involved. So I am officially retired as of the end of December, 1997.

AH: Wow.

EB: And I'm enjoying every minute of retirement.

AH: Well congratulations!

EB: Thank you.

AH: Um, I understand that there was a suit, a class-action suit against Bechtel at one time.

EB: Yes, this happened--I don't remember the year but there were--

AH: You know what, I'm sorry, my tape's about to end so let me flip it over on the other side. Thanks.

[End tape 2, side A]

[Begin tape 2, side B]

AH: --side 2 and I just asked Mr. Bussey about a class action suit against Bechtel Corporation?

EB: I think the suit was brought some time towards the end of 1978, '79, thereabouts. This suit was brought by four employees of Bechtel, black employees who felt that they had been discriminated and the thing that concerned all of the other black employees was that we were lumped together into the suit as a class action suit which included all blacks. Many of us were concerned that the suit did not really provide any affirmative action and we resented the fact that we were being involved simply because we were black. But anyhow we fought this suit because we didn't like the terms of it. We hired an attorney and we challenged

the suit in court. We did not win but we at least showed we've got enough documentation to show that there was in fact discrimination in hiring practices, training practices, job availability--to learn what jobs were available with the company and what opportunities there would be. We were also concerned about the condition under which some employees had been mistreated. They were subject to swearing, various abuses. And then some were fired under conditions that didn't seem fair. So, there were I guess about 170 of black students at the time and each one gave a--gave the written documentation of their experience. We did not win the case--

AH: You said students, you mean employees?

EB: Employees, I'm sorry. The employees documented their situation and they gave legal documentation to show that the facts were as they were and their particular circumstances. And we presented we thought a very good case. And apparently we, even though we lost the case--well we simply were no match for Bechtel's army of lawyers that they had--we even appealed the case and were not successful there either. But I think we presented the situation accurately enough such that Bechtel did change their administrative procedures and did make conditions much more reasonable for black

employees. So we lost the case but I think we won the right to getting much better treatment. I think several received promotions as a result.

AH: So you're saying the original four who were suing, did they kind of join in with this majority group that was kind of like rewriting the terms of the suit?

EB: Yes, the four brought us all in and we resented that but they were part of the case since they had brought it. But the rest of us didn't feel that we should necessarily be brought in because if there were discrimination, and I'm sure there was some, we were not all discriminated to the same degree, so we felt that the terms of the settlement that these four agreed to was not fair to the rest of us. They of course were brought in as we were all brought in to this case cause it's class action.

AH: So, I'm sorry, so the first group then they did get a settlement originally with their complaint, or there was only--I'm trying to understand if they kind of like went with the terms that the majority, the group that you were with, wanted to have amended or the changes that you wanted to have made to the suit? And so was there just one suit that proceeded or was there two--?

EB: Just one suit brought about by the four people that had brought everyone in along with them. And of course there was just--they were all involved in the suit. So, but we, I thought presented our situation well enough so that Bechtel recognized that there was a need for--

[tape turned off and on]

AH: So could you summarize that for me one more time please?

EB: Yes, the four black employees of Bechtel who thought that they had been discriminated filed the class--filed the suit directly with Bechtel. Bechtel then agreed to settle their claims with some small amount of money and the suit was to include as a class action all black employees. And they were to be included in the settlement which did not provide for affirmative action. And I think they were to receive a small amount of money, but this meant that they could never claim discrimination in the future. We were concerned that since it did not provide for affirmative action, we would not want to agree with the terms. For that reason we filed a lawsuit challenged this class action suit. We did not want to be lumped into something, just simply because we were black which would prevent

us from ever being able to express ourselves if we had a valid claim.

AH: And how was it resolved ultimately?

EB: It was never--well, we did not win the case. We appealed it. We had good documentation that proved that there were instances where there had been discrimination. There'd been all kinds of abuse. That although we did not win the case in court, the Bechtel organization did rewrite their administrative procedures because there had been some people who were affected, even white employees in some cases were not fairly treated. I think our case did correct a number of the abuses that had been made by the company.

AH: Ok, thank you. Is there anything else that you would like to say about your career as an engineer? Any favorite highlights?

EB: There are so many things that I have been involved in that I have enjoyed. I'd say the favorite thing was working with the cable cars. Another thing I enjoyed was the experience working in London, having a chance to see so much of the country. In fact, while we were there I took a course in archaeology [of Britain] and had a chance to go to a lot of the very remote places

like Stonehenge, Woodhenge, the Cursus. There were just so many [?] that we went to. So we went to remote places. We enjoyed a trip we took on the Oxford Canals one weekend. We travelled a distance of twelve miles from Oxford to Upper Hayford, distance of about twelve miles, took us a whole day. We went through the locks and we walked along the [side]. We [stopped] at pubs. That was just a great experience. Also the time I spent in Saudi Arabia. Although it was kind of a strange place, it was a good experience and I enjoyed having been there. All in all I did enjoy many things with my Bechtel experience and, since then, consulting. I've enjoyed the freedom of working on interesting projects.

AH: Before asking about some of your other activities over the years like with different organizations, I want to ask more about your family life. And we met Mrs. Bussey earlier. Um, I was wondering if you have any children?

EB: No.

AH: Ok, no children? Um, let's see you told me about your first wife in the last interview and you all were married for how many years?

EB: About 12 and a half years.

AH: So that was until 19--

EB: '46 until '58.

AH: Ok, so then you remarried in 1971?

EB: Yes.

AH: Ok.

EB: I remarried Lucy for about six months after that,
[dates?].

AH: That was the name of your first wife?

EB: Yes, second--second wife.

AH: Oh, your second wife, ok I'm sorry--

EB: I was married for about six months to a second wife. I
don't know the dates, and so my present wife Sandra and
I have been married 27 years from 1971 until the
present.

AH: Ok--

SB: 27 in August.

EB: In August.

AH: Do you have any children from your previous marriages?

EB: No.

AH: Ok, um, let's see I wanted to ask about your work in the Down's Church, your educational work?

EB: I had studied electrical engineering at the University of California and I had a--well, U.C. Berkeley is a tough school. I did graduate and I think largely as a result of the encouragement I received from my minister, who at that time was Reverend Roy Nichols. He and some others encouraged me. Then later in 19-- in 1989 I-- Well this article in the Oakland Tribune in 1987 mentioned of the students who were dropping they were--a large number of students were dropping out of the University of California. And of only, the Tribune indicated, that only 27% of the black students who enrolled as freshmen stayed and graduated. And it just seemed like the percentage was so high, much, well twice as high as for whites and Asians who were graduating [?], we thought there should be something that people in the community might do to help with

student retention. So we invited some of the students, some of the black faculty, some of the black staff, to come to our church, Downs Methodist Church, to explore things that the community might do to help support students and hopefully improve the student retention. So we had a number of meetings and we had maybe as many as 50 people, of our own members, discussing with them things that we might do. And we came up with some very good ideas of things to do to help students. We found that most of the, a large number of students, were from other cities. They did not have roots in the community and were not even able to get to church because the transportation, especially on Sundays was not very great. So we arranged for carpools for members of our church to stop by and pick up students and bring them to church, those who wanted to. Or some needed housing off campus. We tried to help them with that. And, different things to interact with the students. One of the things that we found was that many of them needed financial aid. And that's an area that I decided to particularly devote attention to. And so I checked with some of the financial aid books in libraries and I found that there's just a wealth of information available about scholarships that were available, especially available to minority students. And we learned that not too many of the students were applying for these scholarships. So I said, well I would copy

information and give it to students, let them know where to apply [for students] these lists that include the name of the organization, have the address and telephone number as well as eligibility requirements and other information. So I would send maybe listings of 8 or 10 listings to the students to apply for these scholarships and many of them were able--many did follow up and were able to get these scholarships. And over the years, I think about 9 years now or 10 years, I've sent materials to about 180 students and I'm now beginning to follow up and find out what the students are doing. And I've found that nearly all that I received the follow-up information from did graduate from college and are working in responsible positions. There are two of them, the students, who have PhD degrees. One has a PhD degree in Public Health who is in the research for lung cancer with the University of California in the President's Office. Another has a PhD degree in Public Health who's with the county, Contra Costa County Department of Public Health. There are a number who have Master's degrees such as Amy Holloway who is a graduate of Yale University and Clark Atlanta University, is a librarian with the San Francisco Public Library. There are several who are attorneys who have graduated with JD, jurisprudence degrees. There are a number who have graduated [as] medical doctors. There is one who is a cardiology

specialist in Reno who's also on the faculty of University of Reno. There's a neurosurgeon. There is one who is a business manager for the Cordon Bleu Institute in Paris. There're just a number of students, former students, who now are working in very responsible positions. So I feel very proud that I might have had a chance to touch their lives in a small way. They are doing well and would have even without my contribution but I feel proud that I've known the students.

AH: Well of course I'm very happy and blessed to say that you have constantly throughout my lifetime--I mean at the time that I was applying to colleges with your assistance or referral in terms of financial aid applications and scholarship applications--but throughout my lifetime you've been very supportive of my education and just development as a person. So I thank you very much for your support of me and friends of mine and all of the other young people who you've mentored throughout the years. Um, so today the program is continuing, the work that you're doing and through Downs Church, right?

EB: Yes.

AH: And I understand this past Saturday there was a scholarship luncheon with another one of the institutions that you're involved with, the NAACP?

EB: Yes the El Cerrito NAACP Scholarship Committee, we have been working to raise funds for scholarships for young students, primarily high school graduates. And we're just very proud that--we're getting good support of the community for what we're doing. And the luncheon we had last Saturday was a big success. I think we had around 75 or 80 people who attended. There were many others who didn't come I think because of the rain. But they did buy tickets to support us. There were many people who contributed money. Several organizations contributed merchandise, companies such as Safeway, Lucky's, Semifreddy's bread company, [?] garden, many others--
[tape pause. speaker was coughing/sneezing.]

AH: So it sounds like it was a wonderful event and occasion.

EB: It was, it was.

AH: When did you first join the NAACP?

EB: I've been a member of the NAACP for maybe 40 years and it's an organization I think that's doing good work. And I've been--I've served in various capacities. I served as Treasurer for the El Cerrito NAACP for about six years. And also I served as Treasurer for the northern area conference of the NAACP for about four years. And so I've been active for a number of years. In fact, in 1982 I helped to sell memberships to a large number of people. In fact, I received a medal for the million dollar club. It's for sale of many new memberships, so I feel kind of proud of that.

AH: And when you first joined the NAACP which chapter were you a member of?

EB: I first joined the NAACP in 19-- , about 1956. And I was active in the chapter there with--

AH: A chapter where?

EB: In Sacramento. And some of the members that were in it that were in charge--worked actively with the Sacramento college--NAACP, were Attorney Nathaniel Colley and Virna Canson and others. And so we were very concerned with the housing situation in Sacramento.

AH: So as well as the church, you worked a lot with the NAACP at that time?

EB: Yes, I think the church was St. Andrews AME Church as I remember. I think that was the name of the church. And also the fair housing committee. So there were various organizations working, trying to help find housing for people who were displaced by the redevelopment of the central community center of the city between the Sacramento Bridge and the capitol building. That entire area was being wiped out. Bulldozers were knocking down homes where people lived. So we were trying to find housing for them.

AH: Ok, now I'd like to ask you what are some of your favorite hobbies and interests?

EB: My favorite hobby actually is not so much a hobby, but I do swim twice a week. And this is an advanced swim class that I take to learn the proper way to swim. As a kid I used to swim in an irrigation ditch. And we'd splash around. Now knowing the correct way to swim is much more efficient, much more fun and it helps to keep me fit. Another thing I enjoy is travelling. We have travelled to Europe many times. Last year we went to Italy for sixteen days. The year before we went to Greece for about the same length of time, Greece and

Turkey. We've been to Spain, England, Scandinavia. We've been on a number of cruises, the Panama Canal, Alaska, Caribbean. Last year we also went to the Atlantic provinces of Canada, Prince Edward Island, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick. We had enough frequent flier mileage that we'd earned before so we were able to get airfare to these provinces free. But there're just so many interesting places to see and we just enjoy travelling. On the way home from our trips we usually try to think well where shall we go next. This year we plan to go to British Columbia and spend time there. It's been a few years since we were there last. But there're just a lot of places to see and we enjoy travelling.

AH: Ok, for my last question I'd like to ask about kind of your general philosophy or outlook as we enter the 21st century. I know that you have a particular interest and care for young people in their development. Are there any general insights that you have for the future?

EB: I think everyone should try to think of something they can do to make this a better world. In my particular case I think our youth are our future and anything we can do to encourage them to continue, to progress is what we should be doing. So I enjoy working with the

young people and try to encourage them to do their best. And just very appreciative of what Amy Holloway is doing. And she also is a role model for young people. Quite a few of the students that I have been in contact with are personal friends of hers. At least 10 of the people I sent scholarship material to are personal friends of hers. So she's serving as a very good role model.

AH: Well thank you for saying that. We might have to edit that out. But again I really appreciate all of the support that you've given me and continue to give me in my experience, my educational experience, my work experience, my family life. You're always there for me and I thank you. Is there any other experiences that you would like to share for this interview?

EB: I can't think of anything else.

AH: Ok, well thank you again Mr. Bussey for doing this interview. And we look forward to hearing about your other experiences in the future.

EB: I feel very flattered that you are interviewing me.

AH: Talk to you again soon.

[End tape 2, side B][End interview]